

CHOOSE WISELY

Psalm 1:1-6

How many times have you heard the expression, "Things aren't always black and white?" Many issues in life do seem to be gray – some dark gray, others light gray. We tend to live lives that are neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil. Issues we have wrestled with and the choices that seem to be before us have both good and bad points. So, what is a person to do? Where is the wisdom that we need? The title for this study may hold an important clue to the answer of what we should do: Choose Wisely! If there is a choice to be made in life, then we would have to conclude that there are at least two ways of living. We need to carefully or wisely choose the way we are going to live. The word "way" makes us think of a route or a road we might travel and the word "live" suggests action. Perhaps the key is in recognizing that life itself consists of action and direction. If we are living, then we should and usually are taking action and moving our lives in a general direction.

You might picture this as somewhat like going through a maze. There are a lot of choices to make in going from the entrance to the exit. You could imagine a maze with one entrance and two exits. One exit has a great reward and the other exit has a penalty. We are on the road of life and we are going toward good or toward evil. Our life has a direction. Every person who has not been redeemed moves in the direction of evil – some more rapidly than other. The call of God to mankind echoes down through history. It was sounded by the prophets of old, it was shouted in the wilderness by John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed its message and that is simply "REPENT." Turn the direction of your life around. This is the way of wisdom and the Bible is filled with treasures that extol the benefits of the way of righteousness and the grief of going away from righteousness.

Unless we are given some instructions about how to make wise choices, then we can wind up in dead ends and getting a penalty as the outcome. In Psalm 1 we see some things are helpful in choosing the right path. Some commentators have noted that Psalm 1 is somewhat a summary description of the entire collection of all psalms. Others have pointed out that this first chapter gives the very heart and essence of Christianity.

Things We Are to Avoid:

{1:1} Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Our lives will be benefitted or harmed by the way (walk) we conduct ourselves, the stand we take relative to the enemy of our souls and the position (where we sit) we have relative to God.

There are things that are to be avoided in life. We hear a lot of emphasis about not being negative; however, there are certain things that we should avoid when we realize we are doing or thinking things that are harmful to us. On the other hand, if we can identify what is to be avoided, then that can help us determine what we should be doing.

In our lifestyle or the way we walk, for example, we save ourselves grief if we avoid the advice of people who do not know God's way. People *naturally* look out for themselves and have little concern for anyone else. The counsel of the ungodly is "If they hit you, you hit them back." Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek." If a person is angry with us and heaps verbal abuse on us, then our tendency is to lash back in the same manner. Jesus said that we are to bless those who curse us. The Proverbs tell us "A soft answer turns away wrath." What type of behavior will lead to peace and restored relationships? It's obvious when you really think about it: God's way is the right way.

How, then should we walk? According to Paul in Ephesians 4:1 he reminds us that because of God's grace that has been showered on us, we would be encouraged to walk in a way that is appropriate and in keeping with the name by which we are called. What is that name? We are called Christians. Therefore, we are to be conducting our lives as Jesus conducted His. How did He conduct His life? If we look in Ephesians 4:2-3 we see that it was with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In Ephesians 5:2 we are told to walk in love as Christ also loved us. In Ephesians 5:8 we are encouraged to walk as children of light. In a word: Walk as Jesus walked! How is that possible? If you are a Christian, then the truth of the matter is that you have been crucified with Christ. The only life you have is His life in you.

Where do we take our stand on major issues confronting our society? Do we stand against the devil or do we inadvertently take a stand that is destructive of men's souls? Sometimes, in the name of "freedom of choice," we, as a society, condone wrong things. Some would legalize cocaine use, or prostitution, or pornography, or gambling and, to the shame of our nation, we have already legalized abortion. Many of these are addictive and all are certainly destructive to people. Where do we take our stand? Do we stand in the same place as the "sinners" or do we line up on the side of the "saints?" Where do you think Jesus would stand? That is where we need to be.

Some take a position that is critical of everything they encounter. They tend to be cynical about life. They ridicule even holy things. This is an indication of a deliberately hardened sinner. In contrast, Paul tells us that we, as Christians, have been made to sit with Christ in the heavenlies. This is a position of encouragement, understanding and putting others first.

We need to pray for a discerning spirit that we may recognize the choices we have in life and that we will avoid doing things in the way of the world. We also need to pray that we will stand for what is right and not allow ourselves to become cynical. Even though we live in a fallen world, we need to be careful to seek the Lord for guidance in our thoughts, our words and our actions so that we do not simply reflect the culture around us, but, instead, radiate the light of Kingdom principled living as a witness to the world around us.

Things We Are to Advocate:

{2} But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

A person who does not follow the advice of the world, who does not stand on Satan's side of issues and is not quick to pass harsh judgment on others is likely to be a person who has gained wisdom from the Word of God. While verse one gave us a picture of what to avoid, verse two shows us the positive that we are to pursue. It is in the Word we find the counterpoint to the world's view of life. A wise person recognizes the Word of God as "the right thing to do" and finds joy in the Truth that is there. As a result he will have a good foundation and be able to stand out as a special person whom others will recognize by the integrity of his or her character.

As Christians we are not "under the law" as much as we are "into the law" as we see the value and benefit of living by the principles that are reflected in the law.

Notice that the emphasis here is not just on reading the Word of God but on meditating on it. The idea here is to think about what you have read and to consider its implication in the everyday issues of life. It is the key to really being transformed into become more like Christ in that the Holy Spirit can work in you during your meditation. As we "meditate" on the law, one of the outcomes should be that we discover the principle behind the law so that when we encounter completely new situations that we will apply the principle in the absence a specific "commandment" or written rule.

We can be very thankful to God for giving us His word as an alternative to the way of the world. We need to consciously direct our thoughts to God's word so that we make them an integral part of who we are, the way we think, what we say, and what we do.

Things We Can Anticipate:

{3} He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

If we avoid the way of the world and advocate Kingdom of God principles and make them a part of our being, then we will be as the Psalmist describes: As a fruit-bearing tree planted by a stream. A tree planted by a stream will flourish and grow tall, will put its roots down deep and have a chance to bear fruit and be prosperous. In Wiersbe's *Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* we find these comments:

We must send our "spiritual roots" down deep into the things of Christ and draw upon the spiritual water of life. There can be no fruit without roots. Too many Christians are more concerned about the leaves and the fruit than they are the roots, but the roots are the most important part. Unless Christians spend time daily in prayer and the Word, and allow the Spirit to feed them, they will wither and die. The believer who draws upon the spiritual life in Christ will be fruitful and successful in the life of faith. When Christians cease to bear fruit, it is because something has happened to the roots.

There are many subtle things in various verses that we many times just read over and miss the implication of what is there in the specific words used. For example, David did not say that the righteous is a like a tree "growing" by steams of water but like a tree "planted" by streams of water. The implication here is that a deliberate choice and act initiated the outcome and it was not just something that happened by chance. If you were to plant a tree, then you would have a purpose in doing so. In this case, the purpose was related to the fruit that would be borne.

The promises of prosperity should not be confused with material wealth. The values of the Kingdom of God are righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. On the material side, God has promised to supply our necessities and if He supplies an abundance, then He does so that we might share with others.

The expectation of fruitfulness in the life of a child of God is a continued theme in the teachings of Jesus. Notice that fruit is not always present, but is there in the season of fruit bearing. God may be doing things in your life that will bear fruit later on and it is sometimes difficult to see evidence of fruit bearing all the time. Just as a fruit tree has a time for being pruned, a time for growth, a time to be feed with plant food and a time for fruit bear, the righteous person whom God has planted will have seasons of growth, feeding, pruning and fruit bearing.

Another way to determine the type of tree is by its leaves. For the child of God, the leaf does not wither or fade. The application of this truth to our lives is that others should be able to determine the kind of tree we are even in the off-season. How? They can see it by our general demeanor and the way we handle the situations that come up from time to time.

Aren't you thankful for the streams of Living Water by which we are planted? It should be our strong desire that our lives give evidence of the character of "Christ in us" by the fruit we bear and the witness of our lives to those whose paths we cross.

Contrasting the Wicked and Righteous:

{4} Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is rather stark. All the good outcomes and benefits that are ascribed to the righteous are completely dismissed for the wicked – “the ungodly are not so” according to the KJV. The righteous person is firmly planted as a tree with deep roots and the wicked are as wheat chaff that blows wherever the wind takes it. Which choice would we make? When the wind blows do we “go with the flow” or are we firmly planted? There are many winds that would seek to “blow us away.” Some people will align themselves with the latest political wind. Many are influenced by the wind of the society or culture in which they live. Those who are swayed and carried away by the various winds of the times are like chaff rather than like a tree.

Our testimony can be a realization of the truth of the words of the song that says “What a difference You made in my life.” We feel the blowing of the winds of change and the pressure to conform to “the way everybody else does it” or to what is politically correct, but we are firmly rooted in the Lord and He holds on to us so that we are not “blown away” by the trouble, the trends and the times in which we live.

Making an Eternal Difference:

{5} Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous

When Judgment comes, then the wicked will find no place to stand because everything false will be taken away and the only thing on which we can stand is the sure Word of God.

The Psalmist was aware that this life is not all there is to Life with a capital L. Eternity is a reality which we cannot ignore. How we will spend eternity will depend on how we invested in time. We coexist and live side by side with those who ignore God and ignore His ways and His laws. At times, the wicked seem to prevail and we may be grieved because of that and we may grieve for them. After this life is over, there will be a great separation of the righteous and the wicked.

It is helpful for us to always keep aware of the temporary nature of our being. Of course, this applies to those who are lost, also. We should then be alert to the possibility that God will speak through us to those who are lost so that those who do not know Him will repent and turn to Him before it is too late.

Having Confidence in God:

{6} For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

People go through life fooling others and sometimes even fooling themselves, but they do not fool God. God knows. On the other hand, many Christians suffer the pains of ridicule and scorn for their faith and sometimes they wonder if God even cares. They need to take heart. God knows. God knows the way of the righteous and the ungodly. God allows us to choose which life course we want to take. Each individual must choose how he will live and whom he will serve. The way of righteousness leads to abundant life, but the way of wickedness leads to death. If you have never made the right choice, then today is the day of salvation.

We can truly be thankful that the Lord watches over us and is aware of what we are going through. He has provided the Way in which we should walk that is an alternative to the “law of sin and death” by making a way of salvation for us through Jesus.